

Eckart Voigts, Alessandra Boller (eds.)

# Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse

Classics – New Tendencies –  
Model Interpretations

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Ed. by Eckart Voigts and Alessandra Boller. -

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## 16. DYSTOPIA OF ISOLATION: WILLIAM GOLDING, *LORD OF THE FLIES* (1954) AND ALEX GARLAND, *THE BEACH* (1996)

VIRGINIA RICHTER

### 1. The Generic Tradition: Utopia and Robinsonade

The dystopia of isolation is a hybrid genre, deriving from the utopian tradition and the robinsonade. In a way, the very idea of utopia is based on isolation and separation. Without a spatial or temporal removal from the flawed society to which it is contrasted, the ideal commonwealth – and its counterpart in classic dystopia, the totalitarian state – would not be able to maintain the ideological and institutional purity on which it is predicated: “Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space, in other words, [...] the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation” (Jameson 2005: 15). Already Thomas More’s foundational text stresses this necessary condition: with a single exception in Late Antiquity, the Utopians had no contact with “Transequatorials” (*Utopia* 46), the inhabitants of the Old World, before the arrival of Raphael Hythlodæus. The crescent-shaped island of Utopia is protected by sharp rocks as well as by artificial fortifications, so that foreign invasion has become impossible. Paradoxically, however, invasion constitutes the founding act of the commonwealth: while still a peninsula, the country was conquered by Utopos whose first action after his victory was to cut a channel through the isthmus connecting Utopia with the mainland, thereby creating the isolation requisite for the transformation of “a pack of ignorant savages into what is now, perhaps, the most civilized nation in the world” (50). The perfect commonwealth praised by Hythlodæus is thus constituted by the interleaving of occasional contact and self-imposed isolation. According to Fredric Jameson (2005: 5), it is precisely its combination of systematicity and closure that constitutes “the source of that otherness or radical, even alien, difference” that marks the utopian genre, but also predisposes it to the totalitarianism revealed in dystopia.

Most classical utopias and dystopias are sealed off from other societies, be it topographically (Francis Bacon, *Nova Atlantis/New Atlantis*, 1624/1627), by their setting in the future (William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 1890), or by a system of rigid surveillance and mind-control (Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, 1932; George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949; Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 1953; Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 1985; see the respective chapters in this volume). In most cases, the action is triggered when the external, carefully policed boundary is crossed by a visitor, an intruder or an artefact – such as the few books that escape burning in *Fahrenheit 451* – from the outside world or the past, and the isolation is, at least temporarily, overcome.

By contrast, the event constituting the robinsonade is an act of separation: as a result of a shipwreck or similar accident, an individual or group is marooned on an island or other isolated place. Just as the utopian genre can be divided into eutopias and dystopias (cf. Kumar 1987), robinsonades follow either a positive plot line, resulting in the protagonists' successful adaptation and moral renewal, or a negative plunge into degeneration, animalisation and madness. In the founding text of the genre, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the eponymous hero succeeds in overcoming his sinful state and establishing a one-man commonwealth of which he is both the governor and, until the arrival of Friday, the only subject. In the robinsonade, isolation is a necessary condition as well as a terrible plight and, strangely, a protected state. His involuntary seclusion shelters the islander from a Hobbesian world, the lawless state of nature described in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), in which other human beings are as much a threat – cannibals, pirates, imperial rivals – as a promise of consolation and company. Consequently, Robinson's first discovery of a human footprint on the beach sends him into hiding. After several years of isolation, the first visitor on the island raises terror rather than the hope of deliverance. And rightly so; the intruders come to the island to celebrate their cannibal feasts. The threat of something horrible happening in the isolated setting of the robinsonade is present already in this early example of the genre, but here the transgression of human(e) codes of behaviour is ascribed to the exotic other, the indigenous 'savage.'

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Robinson's upbeat example of successful survival, domination of nature and colonisation is emulated in various popular novels, paradigmatically in the Swiss pastor Johann David Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (*Der Schweizerische Robinson*, 1812). The shipwreck of a whole family, including father, mother and four sons, on a tropical island allows for a pedagogic shift, influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau, of the robinsonade plot, in the course of which the boys acquire protestant virtues such as self-reliance and good husbandry. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the robinsonade definitely becomes a genre for young readers – mostly, for boys – featuring adolescents, now cast away without parental guidance. However, despite this additional hardship – or, from a boy's perspective, this additional perk – the young protagonists of the robinsonade-cum-adventure novel meet the various challenges, including their own transition to adulthood, successfully (R. M. Ballantyne, *Coral Island*, 1858; Jules Verne, *Two Years' Vacation/Deux ans de vacances*, 1888). This optimistic confidence in the boys' survival skills in the face of untamed nature is based on a Eurocentric anthropology which takes the innate superiority of the white race (and specifically, its male representatives) as a given.

Only very few 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts venture to disrupt the dichotomy between European man and the uncivilised, animalised other. One of these exceptions is H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896): here, the half animal, half human inhabitants of the island are described as uncanny – strange and at the same time familiar. It is their very similarity, their humanity, that is disquieting. In the wake of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory (*On the Origin of Species*, 1859), the categorical distinction

between humans and animals has become difficult to maintain. The narrator of *The Island of Dr Moreau* recognises in the revolting Beast People a distorted mirror image of his fellow-humans. At the same time, the confidence in the moral and intellectual superiority of Western man is on the wane: the agent behind the horror resident on the island is the scientist Dr Moreau, while the threatening Beast People turn out to be the victims of his experiments.

## 2. The Robinsonade as Dystopia: Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* and Its Successors

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the robinsonade finally takes a dystopian turn. If Darwin's claim that humans and animals are related resulted in reinforcing the fears of degeneration that infused 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture alongside its faith in progress and perfectibility, political events in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century added fuel to the concern that 'civilised man' is separated only by a thin veneer from a barbarian or animal state. In particular, the two world wars and the Holocaust led to the re-emergence of a negative anthropology, diametrically opposed to Rousseau's belief in an innately good human nature. In the inter-war period, cultural theorists such as Sigmund Freud posited that civilisation resulted from the collective repression of innate libidinal and aggressive drives (*Civilisation and Its Discontents/Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930). In other words, once such external restraints were removed, the 'savage within' could break free and follow his natural, destructive inclinations. Ballantyne's narrative about young boys marooned on a remote island was revisited in 20<sup>th</sup>-century dystopian fiction and given a dramatically pessimistic twist.

Certainly, the work that epitomises this rewriting of the classical boy robinsonade is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954; cf. Babb 1970; Booker 1994: 161-164; Dick 1987; Kinkead-Weekes/Gregor 1967; Spitz 1970; Woodward 1983). Published less than a decade after the Second World War, *Lord of the Flies* describes the plight of a group of English schoolboys who, after a plane crash, find themselves alone on a tropical island. While initially they try to set up rules and maintain the accustomed order of public school life, their civilising efforts soon begin to fail. The conflict between the group's two charismatic leaders, Ralph and Jack, escalates into a kind of tribal warfare that simultaneously bears the marks of a conflict between democracy and fascism. Jack is from his very first appearance characterised as a 'leader,' "intimidat[ing] by this uniformed superiority and the offhand authority in [his] voice" (*Lord of the Flies* 22). Piggy, an intelligent but asthmatic, overweight boy, is immediately singled out as an outsider whose exclusion initially serves to stabilise group cohesion: "A storm of laughter arose and even the tiniest child joined in. For the moment the boys were a closed circuit of sympathy with Piggy outside" (23). Jack's ridicule of Piggy is not challenged by his 'democratic' opponent Ralph; on the contrary, it was Ralph who betrayed Piggy's derogatory nickname.

On one level, *Lord of the Flies* is a political allegory, depicting the precariousness of democracy when attacked by fascist populism. But underlying this political reading is an anthropological foundation asserting that human nature, when left alone, will not show its innate goodness but, on the contrary, its aggressive, destructive drives. If 19<sup>th</sup>-century robinsonades affirmed that the progressive trajectory of humankind towards higher civilisation and perfectibility would always assert itself, their generic inheritors, 20<sup>th</sup>-century dystopias of isolation, would show the irresistible reversal: the castaways' degeneration into barbarism and, finally, an almost animal state. For the literary representation of these antithetic anthropologies, the choice of children and adolescents is important: they have not yet completed their formation or, in Freud's term, the process of cultural repression; in consequence, their innate dispositions will come to the fore once adult control has been removed. And, as Golding suggests, these dispositions will lead them to kill.

The boys in *Lord of the Flies* are not able to maintain order. The symbol of democratic participation, a conch found on the beach, is shattered. The maintenance of their huts, rules of hygiene, a fire built to alert potential rescuers – all these civilising efforts slowly fall into neglect. Under the influence of irrational fears and the primeval experience of hunting, the ingrained habits of civilisation – “the taboo of the old life [...] the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law” (67) – are loosened, until violence breaks out within the group, at first directed against the outsider Piggy (cf. 77). The marooned children begin to regress, individually and collectively: “Ralph turned his hand over and examined [his nails]. They were bitten down to the quick though he could not remember when he had restarted this habit nor any time when he indulged it” (120). Just as the young boy falls back into the habits of infancy, the group as a whole retrace their phylogenetic trajectory and turn into savages as the violence escalates, from hunting wild pigs to ritual violence that finally erupts in a bacchantic frenzy, resulting in the killing of one of the boys who takes the place of ‘the beast’:

The sticks fell and the mouth of the new circle crunched and screamed. The beast was on its knees in the centre, its arms folded over its face. [...] The beast struggled forward, broke the ring and fell over the steep edge of the rock to the sand by the water. At once the crowd surged after it, poured down the rock, leapt on the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws. (168)

Both the supposed prey and the hunters have become dehumanised, turned into wild things that kill with their ‘teeth and claws.’ The collective regression culminates in Piggy's deliberate murder and is stopped only by the final arrival of British soldiers. The officer interrogating Ralph, disappointed and embarrassed by the poor show “a pack of British boys” (222) had put up, invokes the original model for boys in that situation, “the Coral Island” (223). But Ralph, who narrowly escaped being hunted to death himself, knows that the glamorous island of the boys' adventure novel is now “scorched” (223); the belief in innate innocence is a thing of the past.

With *Lord of the Flies*, Golding established a model for the dystopia of isolation that was taken up by various authors in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the few novels to play out the idea of castaway girls is Marianne Wiggins's *John Dollar* (1989; cf. Cokal 1999). Eight schoolgirls, most of them the daughters of English colonial parents, strand on a remote island off the coast of Burma. With them is the sailor John Dollar whose back was broken in the shipwreck. Like Golding's boys, the girls initially attempt to preserve civilised order while they wait to be rescued. They are demoralised, however, by the difficulties of life in the wilderness and, finally, by a deeply traumatic experience. From their hiding place, they observe the murder and subsequent consumption of their fathers by cannibals: “They watched their fathers writhe and pop and as they watched, the wind brought an aroma to them over the hill” (*John Dollar* 183). While this event marks the girls' final transition from a sphere of relative normality, governed by their hope of rescue, to a desperate state of exception, it only reinforces their descent into savagery and madness that had begun much earlier.

Religion, initially functioning as one of the civilising forces, soon deteriorates into a fanatic cult. Even before their fathers' violent deaths, the girls had treated John only partly as an ordinary adult and partly as an object of veneration: “What they believed he would enact for them, their transformation and their rescue, was worth the effort of their adoration” (205). The followers of this cult groom and feed him, but also exercise their power and increasing cruelty on his helpless body. Under the impact of the cannibal scene, they complete his transformation from a human being into an idol. John's physical helplessness is now compounded by large doses of quinine that result in his mental deterioration and final dehumanisation as the girls' object of veneration and sacrifice:

Before the fire they expected guidance from him, straightforward elucidation of the secret workings of all things – but since the fire he had proven what he didn't know, he'd abdicated, mocked their dedication by refusing faith invested in him, turned away [...]. So Nolly dressed him, Nolly made him extraordinary. In addition to the quinine prayers there was the painting ritual, the rinsing and the washing, the grooming and adornment of him, his embellishment, his prettifying. She became his keeper and Amanda kept his fire. (205f.)

The ‘priestesses’ of this bizarre cult, Nolly and Amanda, commemorate their fathers' transformation into burnt flesh by in turn consuming the living but insentient flesh of John's legs in a parody of liturgical transubstantiation: “Every night they had been paring skin off him, eating morsels from his legs, his flesh, stanching his blood with a hot brand from the fire which he couldn't feel but which left him charred and rotting” (207). The nice English schoolgirls have turned into cannibals. Like *Lord of the Flies*, *John Dollar* ends with the break-up of the girls' community and a hunt of those who refuse to acquiesce in the sectarian regime set up by their leaders.

The dystopia of isolation turns the narrative of the lush tropical island whose involuntary inhabitants can effortlessly adapt on its head. In *Lord of the Flies*, *John Dollar* and other representatives of the genre, such as Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace* (1982), the castaway community may start out with the best intentions to maintain

civilised order or even to build up a better civilisation. However, the absence of institutions that regulate social life invariably leads to a breakdown of civilised conduct and the eruption of uncontrollable violence. 20<sup>th</sup>-century dystopias have lost the belief that human nature is innately good. In this sense, the catastrophes occurring on isolated islands represent society at large. After two world wars, the Vietnam War and the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, human propensity for peace is regarded as precarious, if not a complete delusion. The world outside the island in *Lord of the Flies* is riven by war; in *John Dollar*, social structures are dominated by colonialism and racism; the starting-point of *God's Grace* is a nuclear apocalypse that allows only one human being and a group of apes to survive. Unsurprisingly, not even the primates in Malamud's novel succeed in building up a new, peaceful society; they end up by killing and eating each other. The remote island has ceased to work as a utopian – or even eutopian – site; however, it has not ceased to function as a vanishing point of desire, as a heterotopic place that is set up, and fails, as an alternative to globalised consumer society.

### 3. The Contemporary Heterotopia of Isolation: Alex Garland's *The Beach*

Alex Garland's successful novel *The Beach* (1996; cf. Annesley 2004) is not easily classifiable in terms of genre. It includes features of the utopia and dystopia, the robinsonade, the travel report and the ghost story, but also intertextual references to visual media such as comics, computer games and, in particular, Vietnam films and TV series. In one crucial respect, *The Beach* departs from the conventions of the classical dystopia of isolation: its protagonists have not landed on the island by accident, but voluntarily, after an arduous search for a quasi-mythical beach. The self-styled 'travellers,' seeking to distinguish themselves from ordinary tourists, are driven by the desire for what at first seems to be an urban myth – a widely circulating narrative without foundation in reality – of the perfect beach:

Think about a lagoon, hidden from the sea and passing boats by a high, curving wall of rock. Then imagine white sands and coral gardens never damaged by dynamite fishing or trawling nets. Freshwater falls scatter the island, surrounded by jungle – not the forests of inland Thailand, but jungle. Canopies three levels deep, plants untouched for a thousand years, strangely coloured birds and monkeys in the trees.

On the white sands, fishing in the coral gardens, a select community of travellers pass the months. They leave if they want to, they return, the beach never changes. (*The Beach* 58)

The secret lagoon is a present-day Eden, unmarked by capitalism, globalisation and the large-scale exploitation of nature. While its topography, especially the protective wall of rock, is reminiscent of the original island of Utopia, nature in contrast to the Utopians' regulated agricultural landscape remains in a pristine state, untouched and unspoiled by human hands. However, *The Beach* is not an ecological utopia (cf. Stableford 2010); little thought is given to the preservation of this biotope beyond limiting the number of inhabitants. Access to the island is restricted – the community is 'select'

– but departure is not; the beach is not a prison. At least, this is the ideal the travellers dream of.

Soon it becomes evident that the perfect beach is more than an urban myth. Richard, the first-person narrator, is pointed in the right direction with the help of a map he inherited from 'Daffy Duck,' another traveller staying at the same guesthouse in Bangkok who committed suicide shortly after Richard's arrival in Thailand. Daffy's hand-drawn map indicates the geographical co-ordinates of the mysterious beach, located in a protected marine park in the Gulf of Thailand. The gift of the map triggers Richard's search for the island; it also establishes yet another intertextual link, to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883). Like the horrifying events at the beginning of Stevenson's adventure novel, Daffy's gory suicide should serve as a warning that the promised treasure, in this case not riches but escape from the ordinary, will not fulfil the seeker's dreams. However, Richard is undeterred and, in addition, commits the mistake of sharing the secret with other travellers. He invites a young French couple, Etienne and Françoise, to accompany him on his journey, and later leaves a copy of the map with a pair of Americans, Zeph and Sammy. The hero's mission is no longer a lonely one. He is joined by desirable and less desirable companions, including the ghost of 'Mister Duck' as he calls his departed next-room neighbour.

The first part of the narrative is structured like a classical quest. The hero and his two fellow-travellers have to overcome a number of obstacles, including swimming to their destination from the neighbouring island. Once their ultimate goal is reached, they have to cross the island, discovering on the way that this place is not so pristine after all: tucked away between the island's volcanic cones is an illegal dope field, patrolled by armed guards. Richard, Etienne and Françoise narrowly escape being detected and possibly killed. After this ordeal, a final obstacle separates them from the lagoon where the beach is situated: a cliff "the height of a four-storey building" (*The Beach* 82), too steep to be climbed down. The Eden they are looking for seems inaccessible. In fact, the cliff is the last test of courage the three travellers have to pass: they finally reach the beach by jumping from this height into a pool beneath.

Since the island is described as a 'real place,' linked referentially to present-day Thailand as a nodal point on the map of global tourism, rather than a 'no-place,' it is perhaps better regarded as a 'heterotopia' of isolation. In contrast to utopias, heterotopias are "real places [...] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites [...] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986: 24). Historically, heterotopias function "[a]lmost like laboratories, they can be taken as the sites in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out" (Hetherington 1997: 13). According to Michel Foucault's (1986: 25) scheme, Garland's beach is a "heterotopia of deviation": it is modelled on an existing kind of site, the beach resort, but it is designed to subvert its rules and values, and thus functions as a counter-space to the established economy of tourism (and capitalism in general). The novel's beach community manifests at least two

other features of the heterotopia: it bears a special, disjointed relation to time, that is, its members experience “a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (ibid.: 26). Even more importantly, the beach is not freely accessible: “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. [...] Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures” (ibid.).

A precondition for the beach community’s initial success is its double isolation, in spatial and temporal terms. The lagoon where the beach is located is hidden and fortified, like More’s Utopia, by overhanging cliffs and submerged reefs:

From the waterfall, I’d seen the vast circle of granite cliffs as a barrier to getting back up. A prison could hardly have been built with more formidable walls, although it was hard to think of such a place as prison-like. Aside from the lagoon’s beauty, there was a sense that the cliffs were protective – the walls of an inverse castle, sunk instead of raised. (*The Beach* 102)

While Richard is quick to deny that the lagoon is in any way like a prison (one of Foucault’s examples of heterotopias), his choice of image is revealing. As in earlier utopias and robinsonades, topographical isolation has an ambivalent quality: it protects and encloses. In *The Beach*, isolation is not complete. A permanent stay is not enforced, and in the past, people – such as Daffy Duck – did indeed leave the island. In addition, the community is not completely self-sufficient: at regular intervals, shopping trips, so-called ‘rice runs,’ take place to the closest habitation on the mainland, Ko Pha-Ngan. Getting out is possible but because of the limited means – there is only one boat – it is difficult; the *desire* to leave would be viewed by the community with suspicion. Finally, through the presence of the marijuana field in their immediate neighbourhood, the beach dwellers are linked by contiguity to the international drug traffic; as consumers, they are implicated in its economy. Isolation is therefore a part of the fantasised ideal of the beach rather than its reality.

A second, equally important aspect is the temporal dimension of the beach community’s isolation. The islanders develop a stance that could be called a ‘psychological heterochrony,’ a severance from their own past and lack of interest in the past of others:

But I did find it interesting that I wasn’t the only one to experience the amnesiac effect of the beach. I wondered where the effect came from, and whether it was to do with the beach itself or the people on it. It suddenly occurred to me that I knew nothing about the past lives of my companions, except their place of origin. I’d spent countless hours talking to Keaty [...]. But I didn’t know if he had brothers or sisters, or what his parents did, or the area of London he grew up. We might have had a thousand shared experiences that we’d never made an effort to uncover. (207f.)

Identity construction among the beach dwellers is dehistoricised: contrary to ordinary psychological processes, they do not build up their sense of who they are with reference to experiential continuity, family history and the narrative exchange of information on their respective past. Rather, their identity is constituted by the break with and

silence on their individual histories. Similarly, they seal off the future: no thoughts are given to a life ‘after the beach,’ or to contingencies such as illness, injury and, ultimately, old age. The islanders indeed live in a state of amnesia, in the here of the beach and the now of an isolated present.

At first, life on the beach offers the radical simplification of existence, the escape from consumerism and commodification, that was one of the travellers’ goals. By comparison to the tranquillity of the beach, the trips to the bustling resort Ko Pha-Ngan acquire a nightmarish quality; after his first participation in a rice run, Richard experiences no desire to return to the outside world. In addition to their psychological sense of liberation, the beach-dwellers’ fitness and sense of well-being increase as a result of their physical exertions. Finally, their aesthetic experience of nature is deep and rewarding. As an imaginary social experiment, the beach community thus contributes to long-standing negotiation of what the good life should be, in the second, experiential mode suggested by Ruth Levitas (2010: 9): “Utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being. This includes both the objective, institutional approach to utopia, and the subjective, experiential concern of disalienation.” The islanders seem to carry into effect this utopian impulse: on the beach, people lead the good life.

However, early on there are indications that this perception is not quite correct or rather, that it depends on the suppression of undesirable questions. Richard gradually comes to realise that the community is less free and democratic, or even anarchic, than it first seemed. In fact, a regime is in place which, while less overt and codified, is scarcely less coercive than the societies in classical dystopias. This becomes most apparent in the organisation of daily work. Each member of the community belongs to a particular ‘detail’ devoted to different areas of work such as fishing and gardening. Once assigned to a task, it is almost impossible to switch to another – unless by the unofficial leader Sal’s permission or, in fact, order (cf. *The Beach* 118f.). Sal’s role as the person pulling the strings soon becomes evident: “If there was a leader, it was Sal. When she talked, people listened. She spent her days wandering around the lagoon, checking on the different work details and making sure things were running smoothly” (119). She seems to have acquired this position by sheer charisma and to use it for the sole benefit of the community. The hidden totalitarian structure of her regime only comes to the fore when things cease to ‘run smoothly.’

The beach community lacks any religious or ideological underpinning. The only shared axiom of faith is that the existence of the beach must be kept a secret. That this isolationist dogma is as absolute, and as oppressive, as any fully developed communist or fundamentalist utopian system becomes clear when three Swedish group members are attacked by sharks while out on a fishing expedition. One of them, Sten, is so severely wounded that he dies shortly afterwards and is quickly buried in a ceremony designed to provide closure (cf. 316). However, this closure – the hoped-for return to blissful amnesia – is prevented by the liminal state of the two other Swedes. Christo sustained only light wounds but soon collapses, apparently due to internal bleeding.



His wounds finally become gangrenous and his state deteriorates beyond any hope of recovery. The group reacts by providing what basic medical care they have at their disposal, but the option of taking him to hospital is never even considered since this would mean endangering the beach. As Christo's dying is endlessly protracted, the collective awareness of his state is more and more repressed, as Richard remarks: visiting Christo and his 'nurse' Jed in the hospital tent "would be a tacit acknowledgement of Christo's existence – which, under our consensus, was perhaps the most important of the Things To Ignore" (372). The third Swede, Karl, who escaped physical injuries in the shark attack, is deeply traumatised and finally suffers a mental breakdown. Like Christo, he becomes a 'Thing To Ignore,' physically marginalised, progressively neglected and finally "simply forgotten" (339).

If the sudden intrusion of death, disease and madness in their midst leads to a collapse of solidarity, threats from the outside hasten the group's moral break-up. The Americans whom Richard had provided with a copy of his map are finally making their way to the beach, accompanied by some German travellers. Richard is deployed by Sal to watch their progress to, and then across, the island. It is not quite clear – because orders remain unspoken – whether she expects him to kill them; in the end, it is not necessary. The intruders are intercepted by the dope guards, beaten up and finally shot. The beach dwellers' only consideration during these events – if they do not choose to ignore them altogether – is what impact they will have on their isolationist heterotopia. Richard's position at this stage, divided between loyalty to what the beach stands for and growing criticism of Sal's regime, is further complicated by his fascination for the Vietnam War which occupies an increasing space in his fantasies. While he regrets that his former companions are about to be killed, his voyeuristic addiction to violence is simultaneously gratified: "I was also buzzing. It looked like the problem with our uninvited guests was about to be solved, and as if that wasn't enough, I was also going to find out what happened when the dope guards caught someone. Better than that, I was actually going to see it" (354). Richard's 'problem' with Sammy, Zeph and their companions is not only that their arrival at the beach might disrupt the already precarious balance even further, but that they would reveal that he was their original source of information. Richard becomes complicit in their execution by omitting to warn them, by profiting directly from their deaths and, not least, by actually enjoying – albeit in a half-horrified, half-fascinated way – their mistreatment at the hands of the guards. His moral integrity is even further compromised by his frantic attack on Karl – although he later refuses Sal's demand to kill him (cf. 386) – and finally, his killing of Christo, a deed which, however, can be regarded as an altruistic act, enabling Jed to join the small group of dissidents who finally decide to leave the island (cf. 413).

Richard's journey, which began as a quest for the good life in a paradisiac place, in the latter part of the novel takes a turn towards hell, framed by references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899/1902) and the Vietnam War movies inspired by it (mainly Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, 1979). The familiar who accom-

panies him on his rambles through the jungle is the spectral figure of Mister Duck. This ghost, always appearing at moments of crisis, points out that Richard's desire was from the very beginning ambiguous, that while he wanted the salvation of the beach, he wanted the violence of Vietnam even more: "I never offered you anything but Vietnam, and only because you asked for it. It so happens you wanted the beach too. But if you could have had Vietnam and kept the beach, it wouldn't have been Vietnam" (*The Beach* 379). Eden and Vietnam are not compatible. If the beach represents a utopian withdrawal from the globalised world, the fantasmatic presence of Vietnam stands for the inescapability of contact and conflict. The ideal of the beach does not suffice to counteract the heritage of the Vietnam War and the enduring conflict between the North and the South.

The beach community is not only fatally affected by its contiguity to the dope field and the ensuing conflict of interests with the drug dealers; that is, it is not only external violence that leads to the social experiment's demise. The community collapses because its internal aggression is literally fed by the dope pinched from the dangerous neighbours. To facilitate his own and his friends' escape from the island, Richard adds handfuls of marijuana to the food that is being prepared for that night's party. However, instead of the feast of reconciliation this is meant to be, the party turns into a nightmare. The armed guards suddenly show up, dragging with them not only the corpses of the murdered travellers but the map Richard had drawn. The beach dwellers narrowly escape being massacred in their turn; but the unexpected confrontation with the results of the violence that had been going on just outside their 'resort,' together with the effects of the drug, leads to a collective frenzy. Just like other dystopias of isolation, *The Beach* ends with a collapse of civilisation and a bacchantic plunge into violence. The crazed islanders dismember the corpses left behind by the guards:

It began with kicking, which quickly became stabbing. In the chest, the groin, the arms, anything. Next he straddled the corpse and began tugging at the neck. Or that's what I thought he was doing. [...] I only saw when he rose up. He'd cut Sammy's head off. Cut it off, and was swinging it by the hair. And suddenly Jean had a knife and was cutting at the thin German girl, slicing into her belly and pulling out her insides. Then Cassie joined them, hunched over Zeph, working on his thighs. Etienne vomited, and within seconds the corpses were swarmed. (428)

From a disciplined, idealistic community, the beach-dwellers lose their cherished individuality and turn, like the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, into an animal-like horde or 'swarm.' Richard, now revealed as the culprit instrumental in bringing Sammy and the others to the island, is about to fall victim to their frenzy, when he is saved by the *deus-ex-machina*-like intervention of his friends. Together they escape from the island and return to a civilisation which is now, after all, accepted as the better, viable if more sordid option after the nightmare of the island.



#### 4. Dystopias of Isolation in Contemporary Film and Television

The topos of the remote island has always featured in the history of film – early examples include *The Mysterious Island* (1929) and *Island of Lost Souls* (1932) – but cannot be recapitulated here. In conclusion, it will have to suffice to point very briefly to some recent examples of cinematic dystopias of isolation. An obvious point to connect the fictional tradition to film is the adaptation of Garland's novel by Danny Boyle (2000), featuring Leonardo di Caprio as Richard. More romantic and glossy than the original, the film's ending departs crucially from the novel. In the place of Garland's collective orgy of violence, the film restricts active ethical deviancy – in contrast to the passive denial of others' suffering – to a single member of the beach community: only Sal is ready to kill to preserve the integrity of the beach, and thereby, she loses her hold over the others. Collective human decency asserts itself, and *all* the beach dwellers – rather than just the small group of dissidents in the novel – leave the island on a raft.

The same year saw the release of *Cast Away*, directed by Robert Zemeckis. The film shows Tom Hanks as a FedEx employee who, after a plane crash, survives for four years on an uninhabited island. Closer to the classic robinsonade than the 20<sup>th</sup>-century dystopia of isolation, *Cast Away* affirms the indomitability of the human spirit under adverse circumstances. If these two films are taken as symptomatic for the treatment of the topic in mainstream cinema outside the horror genre, then the medium seems to be shying away from an exploration of the negative anthropology that underpins the literary dystopia of isolation. A darker picture, however, is shown in the TV series *Lost* (2004-2010), in which the 48 survivors of a plane crash have to contend not only with the trauma of loss and isolation, but also with the mysteries of the Pacific Island where they are cast away. Finally, a film that intertwines the narrative of human resilience with a dystopian view is Ang Lee's *Life of Pi* (2012), based on the novel by Yann Martel (2001). After a shipwreck in the middle of the Pacific, Pi saves himself on a raft together with a Bengal tiger and other animals (which are subsequently eaten by the tiger). The story of his precarious cohabitation with the tiger which Pi tells after his rescue occludes a second, less fantastic narrative in which his fellow-passengers were not animals but humans. They perished because their fears and privations turned them into brutes.

These examples show that the paradigmatic dystopia of isolation established by William Golding, while it still exerts an influence on fiction and film, has become more varied. If contemporary representations show little faith in utopian societies, they equally eschew Golding's linear narrative of an inevitable relapse into barbarism. Rather, the novels, films and TV series mentioned here express an interest in the predicament of survival, negotiating altruism and cooperation as well as the egotistical drive for self-preservation and psychotic aggression against others. Contemporary dystopias of isolation have become multifaceted and, in consequence, less predictable.

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